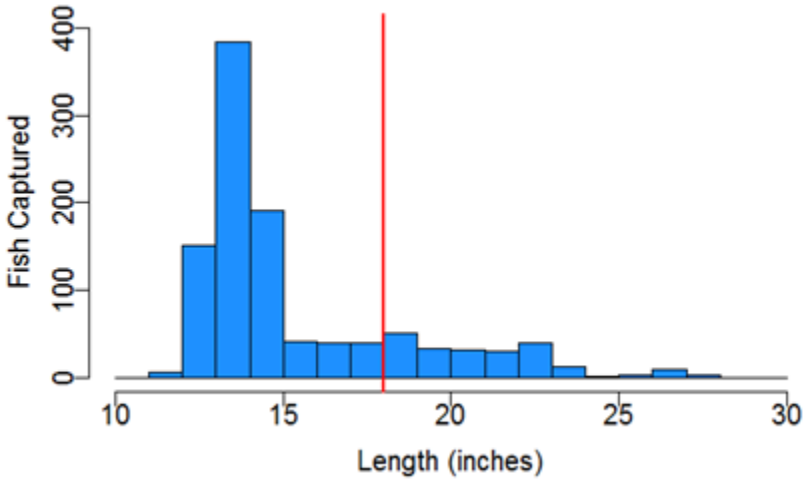
Spring Fisheries Survey Summary
Lake Chetac, Sawyer County, 2017

The Hayward DNR Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Lake Chetac (also known as Big Chetac) from April 3-8 (immediately after ice out), 2017 to assess the adult walleye, northern pike, yellow perch and black crappie populations in the lake. Up to twelve nets were set overnight for five total nights which resulted in 56 total net-nights of effort. An electrofishing survey conducted on June 6, 2017 documented the status of bluegill, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and non-game species but also provided information on juvenile walleye. Six miles of shoreline were shocked. Quality, preferred, and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on standard proportions of world record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

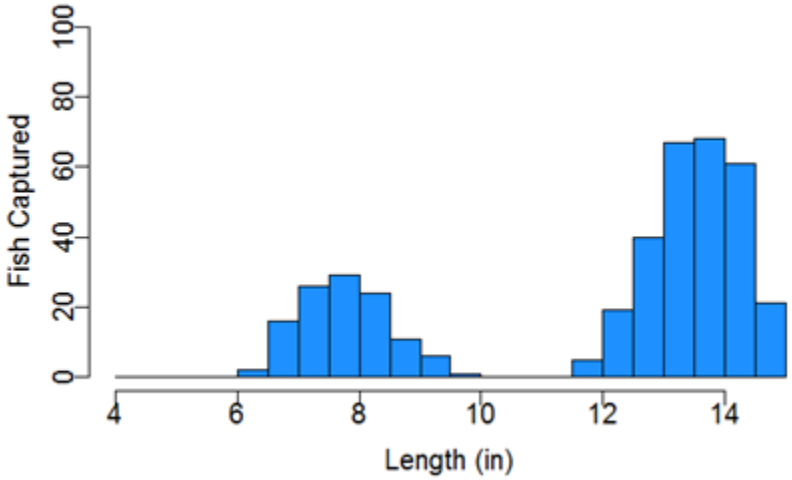
Walleye (Adult)

Captured 19 per net-night ≥ 10 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 15”	**32%**
Preferred Size ≥ 20”	**13%**



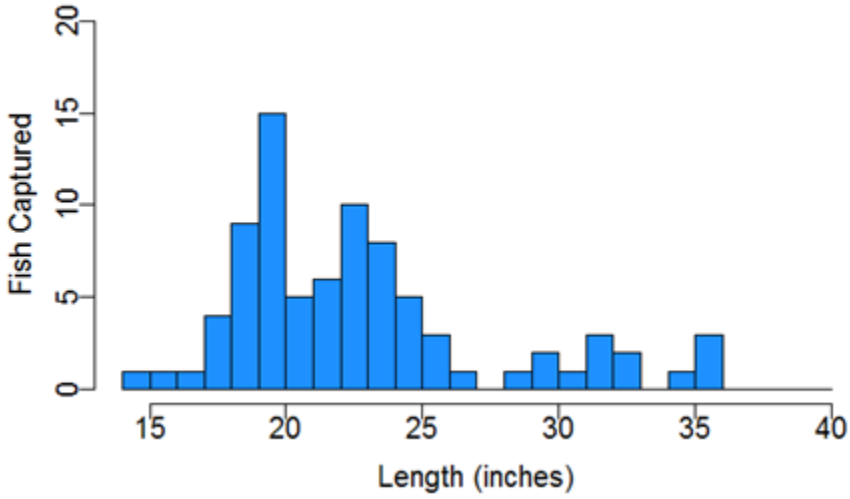
Walleye (Juvenile)

Captured 66 per mile ≤ 15 inches



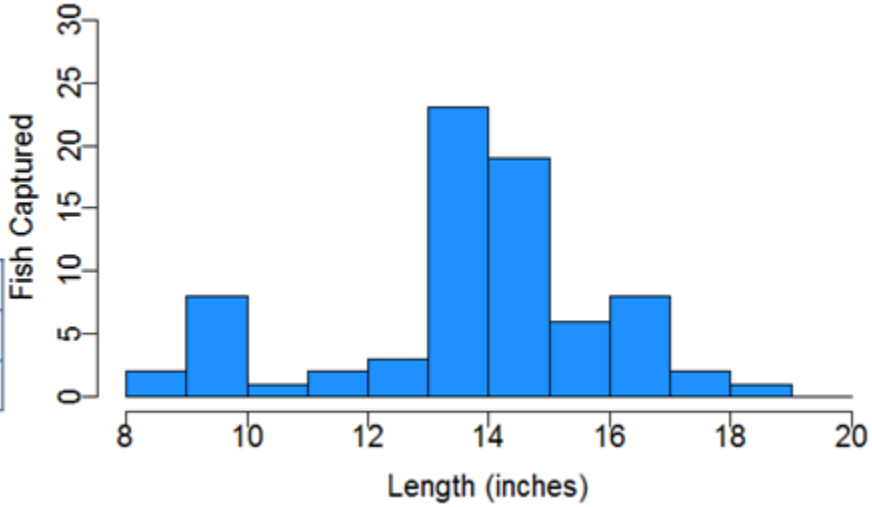
Northern Pike

Captured 1 per net-night ≥ 14 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 21”	56%
Preferred Size ≥ 28”	16%



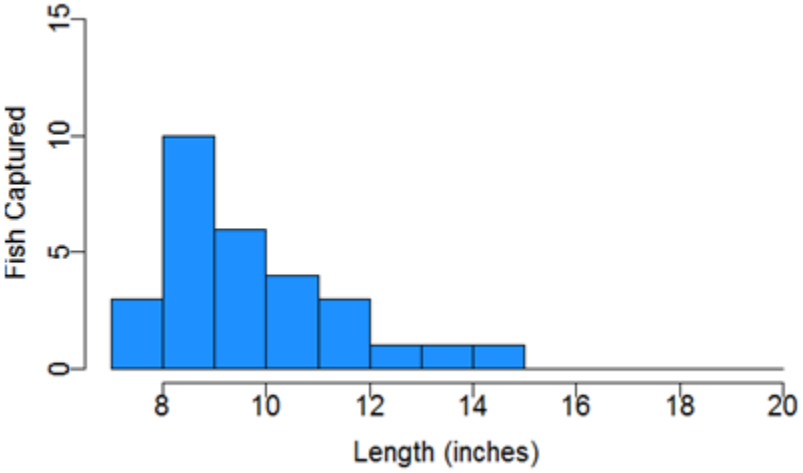
Largemouth bass

Captured 13 per mile ≥ 8 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 12”	83%
Preferred Size ≥ 15”	23%



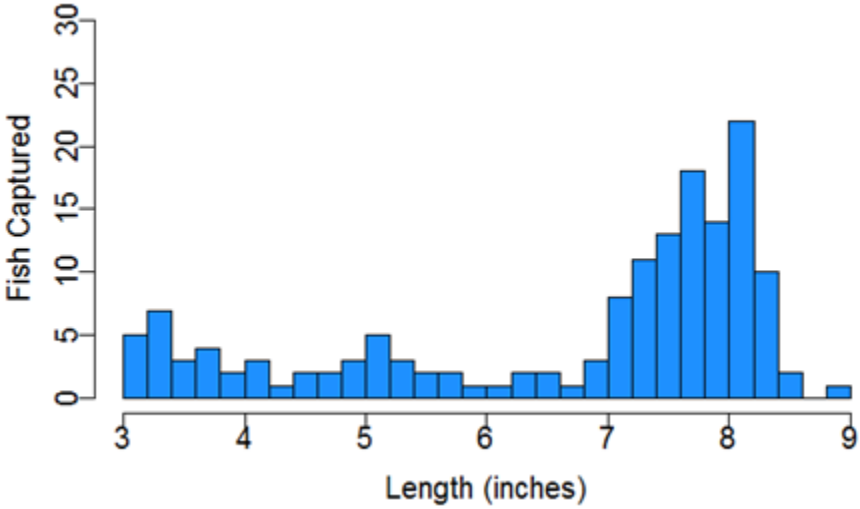
Smallmouth bass

Captured 5 per mile ≥ 7 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 11”	21%
Preferred Size ≥ 14”	3%
Memorable Size ≥ 17”	0%



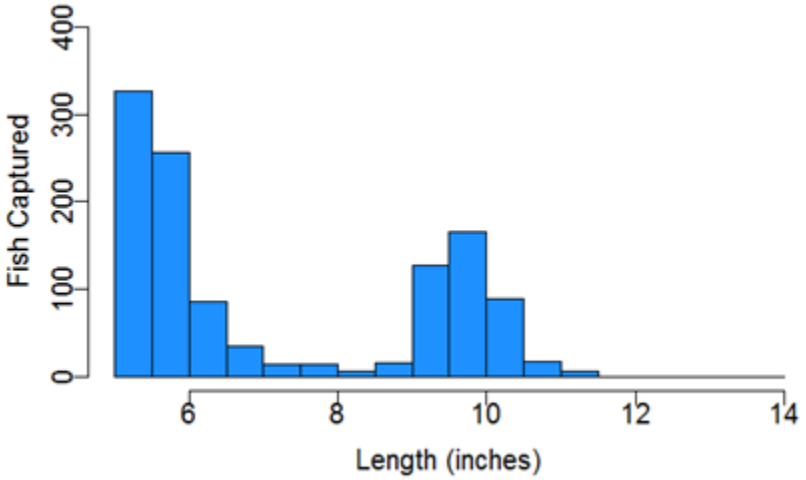
Bluegill

Captured 102 per mile ≥ 3 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 6”	71%
Preferred Size ≥ 8”	23%



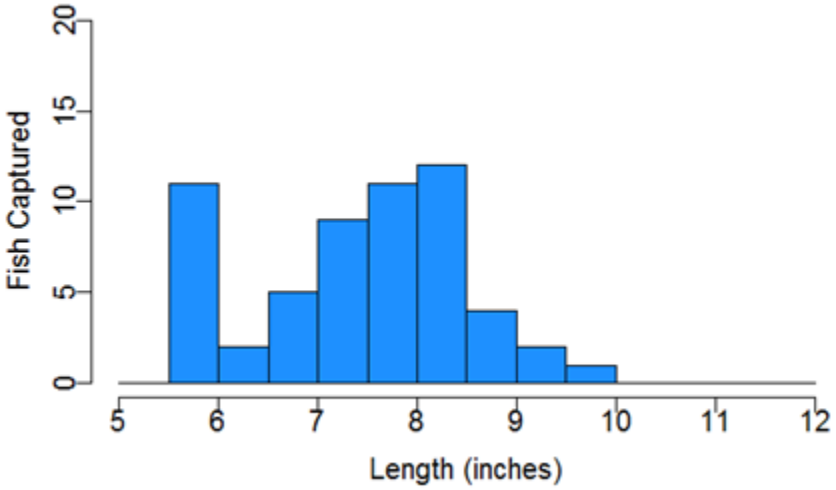
Black Crappie

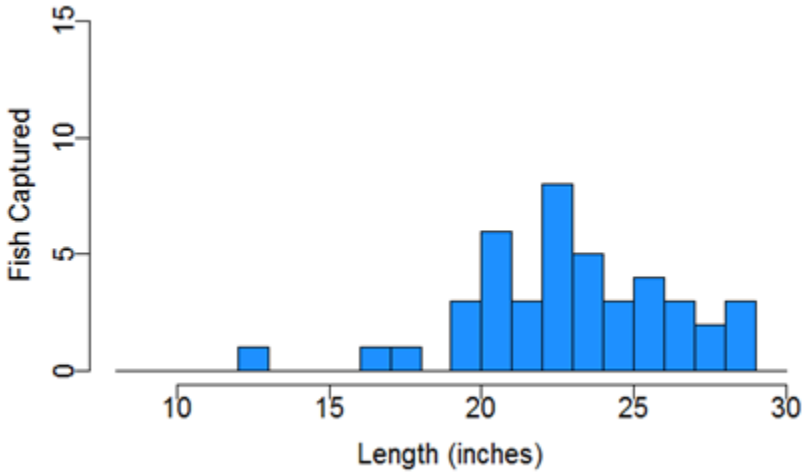
Captured 37 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8”	37%
Preferred Size ≥ 10”	10%



Yellow Perch

Captured 1 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8”	33%
Preferred Size ≥ 10”	0%





Summary of Results

The DNR's 2017 fish survey efforts on Lake Chetac focused on walleye, but provided useful information on most other fish species as well. Both the netting and electrofishing efforts included in this survey were well timed to capture target species. The results of this survey provide a lot of reasons to be optimistic about the future of the Lake Chetac fishery.

Adult walleye appeared to be moderately abundant based on the netting portion of this survey. A mark-recapture population estimate will provide more accurate data on total population size. About one in five adult walleye are over the minimum length limit (18 inches). There is currently a very large year class of walleye between 12-15 inches. The best indication is that these are stocked fish from 2014 based on previous age and growth analysis of Big Chetac walleye. The electrofishing portion of our survey also captured many walleye in the 12-15 inch range, but also many walleye between 6-9 inches. This smaller group of walleye is likely made up of fish from the fall 2016 stocking event. Both spring and fall surveys have demonstrated good early life survival of stocked fish in Lake Chetac relative to other lakes in the area. The prolonged lack of natural reproduction is still problematic and will hinder efforts to create a more dynamic walleye fishery, but stocking does appear to be a relatively effective tool for Lake Chetac.

Northern pike were captured at a relatively low rate but demonstrated above average size compared to other lakes in the area. Chetac has been known as a big pike destination.

Abundance of largemouth bass declined slightly since the last survey in 2013 but size structure has improved slightly including a higher proportion now being over 14 inches. This was the desired outcome when the minimum length limit was removed in 2014. Anglers interested in keeping largemouth bass are recommended to focus their harvest on smaller largemouth. Smallmouth bass were more abundant in the 2017 survey than in past electrofishing surveys, though most smallmouth captured were less than 10 inches in length. The somewhat sudden increase in smallmouth abundance is of interest, but is not concerning.

Lake Chetac is known as a panfish lake first and foremost and the 2017 survey contained good news for that group of fish. Bluegill abundance decreased since 2013, but size improved

dramatically. In 2014, only 1.4% of bluegill in Lake Chetac were over 8 inches. In 2017, 23% of bluegill were over 8 inches. The presence of many small walleye may be keeping bluegill abundance suppressed to some extent which could allow faster growth and better overall size.

Two distinct year classes of crappie appear to be present in Lake Chetac, one around 9-11 inches and one around 5-6 inches (an analysis of crappie age in Lake Chetac will be completed and will add more insight on crappie age and year class strength). Few crappie were captured in between these two year classes. This kind of sporadic crappie recruitment, where big year classes pop up periodically and almost no crappie recruitment happens in between, is common.

Few yellow perch were captured as a part of the 2017 survey despite extremely high catch rates in the 2013 fish survey. This result leaves questions about whether timing of the 2017 survey was suitable for capturing a representative sample of the Lake Chetac perch population.

Bowfin are a native species to Lake Chetac and other lakes at the headwaters of the Red Cedar River drainage. Most bowfin in Lake Chetac are between 20-30 inches long. Bowfin are looked upon negatively by many anglers, but their poor reputation is likely not deserved. While bowfin are not considered good table fare, they put up an excellent fight and are a unique component of the fishery in Lake Chetac. Few other lakes in the Hayward area have bowfin populations.

Walleye of this size were a common (and welcome) sight during the 2017 fishery survey of Lake Chetac. Photo by Evan Sniadajewski.

Report by Max Wolter – Fisheries Biologist, Sawyer County
Survey conducted by Max Wolter, and Scott Braden, and Evan Sniadajewski (Fisheries Technician), and Donna Sorenson (Creel Clerk)
Special thanks to volunteers David Kuester, Tony Manning, Chris Schiefelbein, Rich Manning, Pat Bartlett, and Scott Bartlett.
Reviewed and Approved by Jeff Kampa – Area Fisheries Supervisor